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CONTENTS

Vol. 57, No. 3, June/July 2006

Editorial
Unconditional Presence 2

Our Feature
Healing the Wound of the Heart
John Welwood 4

Illuminations 16

More Grace
Janice Jean Springer 18

Poetry 24

Finding Spirit in Travel
Heather Gramp 28

Prayers 34

Time Out
Kathleen Duffy 36

Dennis
Bridget Haase 40

Book Reviews 44

Endpiece 48

Cover photo by Anne Cornwall

Unconditional Presence

"If love is the greatest power on earth, the force that sustains human life, why hasn't love's radiant warmth been able to banish the darkness engulfing the world, and transform and uplift this earth? If love is our greatest source of happiness and joy, why is it so hard to open to it fully and let it govern our lives? What is the problem?"

~ John Welwood

On a recent weekend, we listened to John Welwood discuss this issue at a seminar in New York City. His questions and subsequent answers are fundamental to all humanity and all faith traditions. His ideas about love, war, and spirituality are intriguing both in their universality and in their surprising simplicity—though it can be a long journey into self-awareness and healing in order to regain the natural gift of unconditional love that flows through each of us as our essential nature.

Welwood asks, "If love is so central to who we are, why do we often feel so separated from it? All the great spiritual traditions have addressed the question of why people treat each other so badly and the world is such a mess. They have provided various explanations for this, such as ignorance, bad karma, original sin, egocentricity, yet what

is the root cause of these afflictions?" In this issue's *Feature,* you'll find the groundwork for Welwood's discussion of these questions.

"Unconditional presence" is the term for a practice Welwood has developed that he defines as "the ability to remain open and present with our experience just as it is, without bias, agenda, or manipulation." All of our stories here are versions of individual choices to simply be present and open to whatever one is experiencing, here and now. How simple this sounds, but what a great challenge it so often turns out to be.

The common realization through these stories is that the further removed we are from our present experience, mentally, physically, or emotionally, the less able we are to experience the love and joy that God, the Universe, our Buddha-nature, or whatever one calls it, has endowed in us as our true nature. It is typically a painful journey back to oneself, only possible if we loosen our controlling grip on ourselves and others, and open to the Love and Wisdom that dwells within us, among us, and beyond us, here and now. Not yesterday. Not tomorrow. Just now.

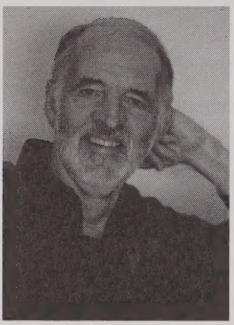
The week following John Welwood's seminar, I was privileged to hear another gentleman speak, Michael Brown from South Africa. We use very little of our full lung capacity, he said, because much of the time we're hardly breathing. We're busy living in the past or the future, and we can't breathe in the past or the future. We can only breathe now, in the present.

As our writers this month all discovered, life is so much richer when we open to the present moment, without controlling it, and learn to just "be"—a huge challenge in our world of "doing." The opportunities and experiences that result can be truly awe-inspiring—even miraculous.

OUR FEATURE

Healing the Wound of the Heart

John Welwood



"Yet even though human love usually manifests imperfectly, there is another dimension of love that is *perfect, unbroken, and always available. It flows directly into the heart from the ultimate source of all—whether we call that God, Tao, or Buddha-nature. This is great love, absolute love—pure unconditional openness and warmth—which actually abides at the very core of our nature."*

~ John Welwood

John Welwood, Ph.D., is considered a pioneer in the work of integrating Eastern spiritual teachings with Western therapeutic practices in ways that are innovative and accessible. Welwood is a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist who was raised in the Episcopal tradition. In his twenties he was drawn to Zen Buddhism and was inspired to explore the interface between Western and Eastern psychology and spirituality. During the 1970s and 1980s he studied with the Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. While he has been a practicing student of Buddhism and Eastern contemplative

psychologies for thirty-five years, the Western spiritual traditions have influenced him as well.

Welwood calls his work "psychological work in a spiritual context," or psychospiritual work. The heart of this work is a practice called unconditional presence, which he defines as the ability to remain open and present with our experience just as it is, without bias, agenda, or manipulation. "This quality of being allows our experience to unfold in the direction of truth, or deeper being," he says.

Welwood maintains a private psychotherapy practice in the San Francisco Bay area, and teaches workshops on psychospiritual work and conscious relationship around the world. (For more information, see www.johnwelwood.com.)

He is currently Associate Editor of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, *and has written eight books. His most recent,* Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships: Healing the Wound of the Heart, *forms a bridge between Christian and Buddhist traditions. He proposes that our relational problems arise out of a universal, core wounding around love which affects not only our personal relationships, but the very quality of love in our world as a whole. He suggests how we can heal this wound to create peace in ourselves and in the world.* Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships *won the Books for a Better Life Award this year and was a selection for the Best Buddhist Writings of 2006. The following excerpt was taken from the introduction.*

The words "I love you," spoken in moments of genuine appreciation, wonder, or caring, arise from something perfectly pure within us—the capacity to open ourselves and say yes without reserve. Such moments of pure openheartedness bring us as close to natural perfection as we can come in this life. The warm

and radiant yes of the heart is perfect, like the sun, in bringing all things to life and nourishing all that is truly human.

Yet oddly enough, even though we may have glimpses of a pure, bright love dwelling within the human heart, it's hard to find it fully embodied in the world around us, especially where it matters most—in our relationships with other people.

Right alongside the truth of love's perfection, there stands another, more difficult truth—the flawed, tangled web of human relationship, which gives rise to tremendous frustration, sorrow, and anger everywhere we look.

Even though there is nothing as simple and straightforward as the warmth of the heart, still, "for one human being to love another, this is the most difficult of all our tasks," as the poet Rilke wrote. And while in one sense love conquers all, war nonetheless remains the governing force in world affairs.

If love is the greatest power on earth, the force that sustains human life—which in some sense it certainly is—why hasn't love's radiant warmth been able to banish the darkness engulfing the world, and transform and uplift this earth? Why is it so hard for love to permeate the dense fabric of human relationships? If love is our greatest source of happiness and joy, why is it so hard to open to it fully and let it govern our lives? What is the problem?

The Mood of Unlove

All the most intractable problems in human relationships can be traced back to what I call the *mood of unlove*—a deep-seated suspicion most of us harbor

within ourselves that we cannot be loved, or that we are not truly lovable, *just for who we are.* This basic insecurity makes it hard to trust in ourselves, in other people, or in life itself.

Not knowing, in our blood and bones, that we are truly loved or lovable undermines our capacity to give and receive love freely. This is the core wound that generates interpersonal conflict and a whole range of familiar relationship tangles. Difficulty trusting, fear of being misused or rejected, harboring jealousy and vindictiveness, defensively stonewalling, having to argue and prove we're right, feeling easily hurt or offended and blaming others for our pain—these are just a few of the ways that our insecurity about being loved or lovable shows up.

How then can brokenhearted people like ourselves heal this woundedness around love that has been passed down through the generations, and set ourselves free from the strife that dominates our world? This is the most crucial issue of human life, both personally and collectively. It is also the central focus of this book.

The Nature and Significance of Love

I would define love very simply: as a potent blend of openness and warmth, which allows us to make real contact, to take delight in and appreciate, and to be at one with—ourselves, others, and life itself. Openness—the heart's pure, unconditional yes—is love's *essence.* And warmth is love's basic *expression,* arising as a natural extension of this yes—the desire to reach out and touch, connect with, and nourish what we love. If love's openness is like the clear, cloudless sky, its warmth is like the sunlight streaming through that sky, emitting

a rainbowlike spectrum of colors: passion, joy, contact, communion, kindness, caring, understanding, service, dedication, and devotion, to name just a few.

According to the saints and mystics, love is the very fabric of what we are; we are fashioned out of its warmth and openness. We don't have to be great sages to recognize this. All we need to do is take an honest look at what makes our life worthwhile. When the presence of love is alive and moving in us, there is no doubt that our life is on target and meaningful, regardless of our outer circumstances. We feel that we're *in touch*, connected with something larger than our small self. This lifts the burden of isolation and alienation off our shoulders, filling us with peace and well-being. But when the presence of love is absent, something often feels sad, not quite right; something seems to be missing, and it's hard to find much joy, even in the midst of favorable circumstances. We easily fall prey to meaninglessness, anxiety, or despair.

Yet if love is so central to who we are, why do we often feel so separated from it? All the great spiritual traditions have addressed the question of why people treat each other so badly and the world is such a mess. They have provided various explanations for this, such as ignorance, bad karma, original sin, egocentricity, or the failure to recognize love as our very nature. Yet what is the root cause of these afflictions?

The Wound of the Heart

If we take an honest look within, we may notice a certain guardedness around our heart. For some people, this is a thick, impenetrable barricade. For others, it is a thinner, subtler protective shield or contraction that

only emerges under threatening conditions. And nothing triggers this sense of threat so strongly as the suspicion discussed earlier: that we are not truly loved or acceptable as we are. Numbing or shutting down the heart is an attempt to deflect the pain of that.

This disconnection from love most often grows out of not feeling fully embraced or accepted in our family of origin—whether through neglect, lack of attunement, or outright abuse. Not feeling securely held in the arms of love, we fall into the grip of fear.

Sometimes the wounding or separation from love happens in more subtle ways. Some parents seem loving enough, yet they covertly or unconsciously dispense their love in controlling or manipulative ways. Or they may not be attuned to the child as someone different from them, a separate being in his or her own right. Such children may feel loved for certain attributes—but not for who they really are. In their need to please their parents and fit in, they come to regard love as something outside themselves, which they have to earn by living up to certain standards.

Children naturally try to protect themselves from the pain of inadequate love as best they can. They learn to separate and distance themselves from what causes them pain by contracting or shutting down. This is one of the most basic and effective of all the defensive strategies in the child's repertoire. Yet it also has a major downside: It constricts or shuts off access to two main areas of our body: the vital center in the belly—the source of desire energy, eros, vital power, and instinctual knowing—and the heart center—where we respond to love and feel things most deeply. In saying no to the pain of unlove, we block the pathways

through which love flows in the body and thus deprive ourselves of the very nutrient that would allow our whole life to flourish. And so we wind up severing our connection to life itself.

This leaves us in a strange and painful dilemma. On one hand we hunger for love—we cannot help that. Yet at the same time, we also deflect it and refuse to fully open to it because we don't trust in it.

This whole pattern—not knowing we're loved as we are, then numbing our heart to ward off this pain, thereby shutting down the pathways through which love can flow into and through us—is the *wound of the heart*. Although this love-wound grows out of childhood conditioning, it becomes in time a much larger spiritual problem—a disconnection from the loving openness that is our very nature.

On the collective level, this deep wound in the human psyche leads to a world wracked by struggle, stress, and dissension. Communities and social institutions at every level—marriages, families, schools, churches, corporations, and nations all across the globe—are in disarray, divided against themselves. The greatest ills on the planet—war, poverty, economic injustice, ecological degradation—all stem from our inability to trust one another, honor differences, engage in respectful dialogue, and reach mutual understanding.

Leading religious and social activists have often understood the proclivity to war as a symptom of alienation from love, and emphasized the central role that love must play in solving the problems of the world. For example, Martin Luther King Jr. recognized the role that grievance plays in generating wars, arguing that only love can cure this illness: "Sooner or later all

the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace. . . If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love."

This is a noble sentiment, yet how can humanity actually overcome its addiction to violence and its cynicism about love? What I suggest in this book is that war arises from grievance against others, and that this grievance is rooted in our love-wound—which we blame on others, taking it out on them. This book lays out a practical path for deeply understanding and addressing this core human problem.

Great Love

Yet even though human love usually manifests imperfectly, there is another dimension of love that *is* perfect, unbroken, and always available. It flows directly into the heart from the ultimate source of all—whether we call that God, Tao, or Buddha-nature. This is great love, absolute love—pure, unconditional openness and warmth—which actually abides at the very core of our nature.

If great love is like the sun, our woundedness is like a cloud cover temporarily blocking its rays. Fortunately, just as the sun cannot be damaged by clouds, so our native capacity for warmth and openness cannot be destroyed. Thus healing the wound of the heart does not require fixing something that is broken. Having a wounded heart is more like being lost—lost in the clouds that temporarily block access to the sun that is always shining. Though we can spend a whole lifetime lost in these clouds, this doesn't mean that the sun itself is lost or damaged. Healing the love-wound, then,

involves making ourselves available to the sun, that it may do what it naturally wants to do: shine upon us.

Letting Love In

Most religions try to remedy the problem of human lovelessness by admonishing us to love more generously. The way to be loved, they say, is first to love. "To him who hath shall be given." "'Tis better to give than to receive."

This core principle of spiritual life certainly contains profound truth. Yet there is another truth that stands alongside it: We cannot give what we cannot receive. Just as the earth is abundant because of its ability to receive and absorb (light from the sun and rain from the sky), so we can only give forth love abundantly if we are able to receive it, soak it up, and be nourished by it. If we don't feel loved within ourselves, then how can we ever truly love? If our wounding prevents us from letting love in, then how much do we have to give?

Thus the key to loving is to become more permeable to love, to let it all the way into us, so that it can live and breathe from inside out. Even if we believe that God is love or that we have a moral duty to love our neighbor, such beliefs will have little effect as long as our "in-channel" is shut down or constricted, preventing great love from flowing freely into and through us.

A Psychospiritual Approach

In my work as a psychotherapist, I have discovered the power of bringing together both psychological and spiritual principles in the process of healing and growth. On the psychological level, this book offers a distinctive

set of understandings and concrete methods for addressing your personal wounding around love and releasing your old grievances so that you can let love flow more freely in and through you. On the spiritual level, it will help you develop your capacity to open, to hold your most difficult experiences in a space of love, and beyond that, to tap into the great force of absolute love that is your very essence, so that it may infuse and illumine your life from within.

May all beings be happy and at their ease. Through knowing we are held in love, may we find the boundless source of joy within ourselves and share this with the world around us. May we realize our true nature as blissful, radiant love.

From Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships, *by John Welwood; © 2006. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publications, Inc., www.shambhala.com.*

Ross Stockwell

ILLUMINATIONS

It is important to keep a stillness in the "marketplace." This still place is where God can dwell and speak to us. It also is the place from which we can speak in a healing way to all the people we meet in our busy days. Without that still place we start spinning. We become driven people running all over the place without much direction. But with that stillness, God can be our gentle guide in everything we think, say, or do.

~ Henri Nouwen

When you return to your Self, this is called awakening... freedom.

~ H.W.L. Poonja

Life is a promise; fulfill it.

~ Mother Teresa

The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love, and to let it come in.

~ Morrie Schwartz

Forgiveness is the fragrance from the violet beneath the heel which has crushed it.

~ Mark Twain

More than all else, keep watch over your heart, since here are the wellsprings of life.

~ Proverbs 4

Great fullness of being, which we experience as happiness, can also be described as love. To be undivided and unfragmented, to be completely present, is to love.

~Sharon Salzberg

Flowers do not force their way with great strife. Flowers open to perfection slowly in the sun. Don't be in a hurry about spiritual matters. Go step by step, and be very sure.

~ White Eagle

And could you keep your heart in wonder at the daily miracles of your life, your pain would not seem less wondrous than your joy.

~ Kahlil Gibran

People deal too much with the negative, with what is wrong. Why not try and see positive things, to just touch those things and make them bloom?

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

When you carry out acts of kindness you get a wonderful feeling inside. It is as though something inside your body responds and says, yes, this is how I ought to feel.

~ Harold Kushner

We grow as humans when we pass through suffering with courage and acceptance. In our weakness we are constantly tempted to try to avoid all suffering, all that is unpleasant. But in this we betray ourselves; we stunt our growth. When we embrace the cross, we grow in self-discipline, self-control, self-giving, we grow in love.

~ M. Basil Pennington

More Grace

Janice Jean Springer

I left a job that I loved and the community that sustained me and the home I'd lived in longer than I'd ever lived anywhere, and I headed for the Montana Rockies where I spent the summer in a log cabin that I helped to build, an off-grid cabin without electricity, phone, water, or bathroom. I was beginning a great adventure, and I thought I knew what God was going to do with me.

I had been a local church pastor for twenty-four years, and I loved that work. I especially loved the people and possibilities of the church I'd served for the last eleven of those years, but I had begun to feel a restlessness, and in that restlessness I discerned a call. I wanted to help other churches deepen their worship and strengthen their sense of community, and I wanted to be more fully in the lives of my young grandchildren. I had been feeling nudges and yearnings in these directions for years; now, it was time. And I thought I knew what God was going to do with me.

I decided that this new venture, though it would eventually lead me actively into the midst of many faith

Rev. Janice Jean Springer, an ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ, has served local churches in the midwest for twenty-four years. She is currently helping clergy and churches to deepen and revitalize their worship, strengthen their faith communities, and do justice work from a place of contemplative prayer.

communities, would begin in that mountain cabin. It was a rich and privileged summer, full of new experiences, both inner and outer ones. I felt healthier than I had for years. I loved the horses that came to my kitchen window. I reveled in the bear grass, the pussy toes, the Indian paintbrush, the yellow salsify. Often the only sound I heard was the gurgling of Mill Creek. I found myself content to do nothing but watch the mountain bluebirds, the hummingbirds, the great blue heron. I was present for the birth of a foal. I saw a wobbly fawn just hours old. I learned how to make a fire in the woodstove, experiencing for the first time that only by the work of my own hands would I be warm. My prayer life deepened. Two of my three children lived in the area, and I took pleasure in their lives, and delighted in reading stories and building block towers with my granddaughter. And I thought I knew what God was going to do with me.

What God actually did do with me was not at all what I was expecting. It took me some time to figure out that God's agenda for the summer and mine were not going to be the same.

I began to feel that everything was being stripped away. I pushed that image aside at first; wasn't I being a little melodramatic? After all, wasn't I doing just what I wanted to be doing? But it was a time of major transition in almost every area of my life, and transitions, even ones of our own choosing, are often painful and difficult. In spite of the great privilege and joy of the summer, what I felt most was overwhelming loss.

I was not prepared for the amount of grief I would feel, no longer being in the faith community I had loved for so many years. I yearned to lead worship again. I had no forum in which to use my gifts. I went from being

known and respected, having influence in the city in which I lived, to being a stranger in a place where nobody knew my name or wanted to. I no longer had a nice office—or any office—and my precious books and resources for ministry were packed in boxes and stored in someone else's house. I had no income except some savings; what if that savings ran out before I could create this new work? I could not know whether, or in what form, I'd ever do ministry again. Had I just ruined my life? It felt to me like God was stripping away most of what sustained me in ministry.

Not having a phone meant I could not reach out to friends whenever I needed to. My budget did not allow for the luxury of a massage, or the support of a spiritual director. Some of my friends seemed unable to understand what I was doing. I would not see my partner for several months. I felt isolated, and I was lonely. Living near my grown daughters meant we saw each other's flaws in a way that we didn't have to notice when we were far apart, and our relationships had to adjust to this sudden proximity. It felt to me like God was stripping away most of what sustained me in relationships.

The challenges and demands of off-grid mountain living were new to me, and I, who nearly always had my life under control, felt incompetent and physically and emotionally vulnerable. And without busy-ness to distract me, I began to see the brokenness of my own character, my self-centeredness, my ego-driven choices, my capacity to be mean-spirited, my self-righteousness. I was forced to acknowledge that I was not nearly as good a person as I had thought. I no sooner saw one flaw in my supposed goodness than another paraded itself before me. I no sooner named one loss in my life than another loss burst

into my awareness. It felt to me like God was stripping away most of what sustained me emotionally.

I clung to the words of the Sufi mystic Rumi: *"I need more grace than I thought."* And there was grace. In midsummer, someone I hardly knew sent me some writing that offered me great encouragement for what I was doing. Her gift included this poem, "Lightening the Load":

> *The first thing we have to do*
> *is to notice that we've loaded down this camel*
> *with so much baggage*
> *we'll never get through the desert alive.*
> *Something has to go.*
>
> *Then we can begin to dump*
> *the thousand things*
> *we've brought along*
> *until even the camel has to go*
> *and we're walking barefoot*
> *on the desert sand.*
>
> *There's no telling what will happen then.*
> *But I've heard that someone,*
> *walking this way,*
> *has seen a burning bush.*

My agenda for the summer had been *addition:* new experiences, more time, captivating insights. I came to realize that God's agenda for the summer apparently was *subtraction*: taking away what my ego clung to for meaning, identity, and sustenance. An image kept haunting my summer: one hand of God was ruthlessly stripping away what I thought I needed to survive, while the other hand of God, embracing me, wiped away my tears.

Jesus comes to me as grief

and I turn away and cry.
And Jesus comes to me as tears,
and my face is wet with Jesus.

All summer long my face was wet with Jesus. But to me, that meant Presence. I spent the season held by that Presence. It was enough.

Neither the stripping away, nor the pain of it, stopped that summer. But I began to surrender to it. I began to trust it, to be able to cry and trust at the same time. When a friend was distressed by my long season of tears, I could assure her, "Nothing is broken. There is nothing to fix. It will end when it ends."

I have left my mountain cabin now, though I will be returning there next summer. My life and my ministry have not taken their new shape yet, though there are signs of new beginnings falling into place. Tears are less frequent now, though it will still be a while before all the loss and vulnerability of this transition fades.

But already I have learned some things from this stripping away experience. I've learned that in the spiritual life trying harder is not as useful as letting go; subtraction is probably a more vital skill than addition. I've learned to live with ambiguity, and to hold everything loosely except the hand of God. I've learned that it feels good to travel lightly. I've learned that I am stronger than I knew. I've learned that the good God is profoundly loving . . . but is no warm fuzzy. I've learned that I need more grace than I thought.

There's still no telling what will happen. But I've heard that someone, walking this way, has seen a burning bush.

"Lightening the Load" was written by Francis Dorff and printed in the newsletter Journey into Freedom, *August 2005, journeyintofreedom.org, 503-244-4728.*

"Jesus comes to me . . ." was written by Sy Safransky and appeared in The Sun *magazine, January 2002, in the feature entitled "Sy's Notebook."*

Juan Carlos González-Nájera

POETRY

Actions Speak Louder. . .

Robert R. Reldan

The other day
I met a deaf child. . .
his face was troubled
as he stood before me
gesturing frantically
trying to get me to understand
the nature of his distress

I had no inkling
or clue
of his needs
so I wrapped him in my arms
and held him close

Now I know how God must feel
as I genuflect
and gesture frantically
before Him
trying to tell Him
of my anguish

Robert Reldan is incarcerated at New Jersey State Prison, Trenton, and while most of his writing is directed to the court as he seeks exoneration, his prize-winning work has appeared in various literary publications, and he has written a children's book titled My Dad's Going to Yale.

Somehow even in my dumbness
my message must get through
and I can feel His arms
fold around me
holding me close

Engulfed

Nancy Compton Williams

Though eons thaw
and continents submerge,
the sacred river underground
will always sing the mother's song
that rocked us at our birth,
assuring us of home.

Trust

Corrine DeWinter

To open one's heart unashamedly
even when we are uncertain,
is to truly live, to believe
in what is not immediate or sure,
to take faith and say:
I trust in where you will bring me.

Nancy Compton Wiilliams is a poet and teacher of poetry and serves on the editorial board for Poem.

Corrine DeWinter is the author of seven collections of verse and her work has appeared in hundreds of journals and books. She lives in Western Massachusetts.

Returning to the Woods

Michael S. Glaser

Slowly, I am remembering
the language of awe,

how to take in, say,
the exquisite complexity of a tree

its gnarled trunk, its ragged bark,
the way its leafy canopy

filters sunlight down
to the brown carpeted ground,

the way the wind bends my heart
to the living presence of trees

that call to me as deeply as I breathe,
as though the woods were marrow of my bone

as though I myself were tree,
a breathing, reaching arc

of the larger canopy beside a brook
bubbling to foam

like the one deep in these woods,
that call to me, that whisper *home*.

Michael S. Glaser was named Poet Laureate of Maryland in 2004. Dr. Glaser has served as head of the Division of Arts and Letters, and chair of the English Dept. at St. Mary's College of Maryland, and also serves as a Poet-in-the-Schools.

Robert F. Campbell

Finding Spirit in Travel

Heather Gramp

It is said that the universe always provides what you need, exactly when you need it, in the form of serendipity, signs, or some kind of watershed event. But sometimes the whisper is quiet, dismissed as being for someone else, or ignored. In the meantime, we might distract ourselves from the message brewing inside, by traveling to a foreign land, leaving a relationship, or just taking time off, deluding ourselves that some radical change might come from a new external circumstance.

Spending these past two years in India, rightfully considered one of the most actively religious, if not deeply spiritual places on the planet, would present obvious opportunities to find a spiritual home for someone like me. I was approaching middle age, had just left a relationship, and was starting to hear the whisper that somewhere a deeper commitment was waiting. Surely serendipity would happen, a guru would present himself, I would be blown away, it would all be obvious and easy in India, wouldn't it?

Heather Gramp continues her personal journeying in India through dharma study, writing, leading trips, and generally exploring the culture and its history. When not leading trips, she is based in Dharamsala enjoying the mountains and eating momos. Heather's current writing project is a book about the women of India.

There are places in India where you cannot walk far without literally tripping over a *saddhu* (a Hindu holy man) swathed in Brahmin orange robe, alms bowl in hand, sitting in contemplation of a cosmic lesson from the Vedic scriptures. Hindu temples come alive at dawn as the morning puja bells and burning incense drift into dreams. And alongside Hindus, India's 120 million Muslims listen for the call to prayer emanating five times a day from the slender minarets of mosques coated in shiny green tile or white marble. In almost any city, there are high priests to consult, and lamas for lessons. Even St. Francis Xavier preached here in the Portugese churches of Goa. If ever there were a place to find a spiritual path, or at least religion at its most basic and outward appearance, India was it.

Intellectually, I got religion in India. Working as a tour leader, taking foreigners around to some of the holiest places, I brought to life the colorful histories and deeper cultural meanings of India's several faiths, instilling a sense of respect and inspiration in my fellow travelers. I could impress with untold facts about the people, places, events in the tortured religious history of India.

Places like Jama Masjid in Old Delhi, the biggest mosque in India, became as familiar as the corner bazaar. Once, I battled the traffic to give visitors an impressive glimpse of the mosque packed with 20,000 faithful men for prayers on Eid-al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan. Likewise, the pantheon of 330 million technicolor Hindu gods and their personality quirks, companions, and conquests from the great epics rolled off my tongue. Explaining the divine loyalty of Hanuman the monkey god, how Ganesh got his elephant head, or why Shiva is blue fed the storyteller

in me. I loved the kitsch of one particular temple with papier mache holy cows and symbolic rivers of milk to wade through.

I hoped that my passengers were getting all this. In fact, I hoped at least some of them would have a religious epiphany in India. With a soft spot for the underdog Islam, I might promote some conversions. At least I would make sympathizers out of them.

After a few lonely months of leading, one fog-shrouded Christmas Eve I took three women to the center of Sikhism, the Golden Temple in Amritsar in the Punjab, for the nightly ritual of putting the sacred book known as the Guru Granth Sahib to rest. I explained about Sikhism being the simple, middle way, developed at a time when Hindus and Muslims were at war with each other, about their gurus and beliefs in gender and class equality. That night, the "tour leader" in me started to let go, silenced by the emotional procession of the holy book being carried in a golden palanquin on the shoulders of the faithful, marigolds falling, devotional singing ringing in the air.

Being among Sikhs on Christmas Eve reminded me of Jesus' message and my own stalled religious upbringing. I remembered why I had come to India, and realized the path I was on was a detour, not yet sure what the right path was. What I knew then was that being a tourist, or moreover being an expert taking tourists to holy places, was not the same as discovering them, inwardly.

Looking back, I remembered passing several times through Varanasi, one of the oldest cities on the planet at about 3,000 years, said to be the abode of Shiva, most powerful Hindu God, who is the creator and destroyer

of all things. It's a place where Hindus want to die, coming here to cleanse their sins in the holy Ganga River, hoping Shiva will hear their prayers and whisper the final mantra to them, liberating them from the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth known as *samsara*. All of this was amazing, but organizing a visit to Varanasi was another matter. Taking tourists to the *ghats*, steps on the river where life happens—all of it, from cremations to bathing to praying to laundry—I had steeled myself against that other less holy aspect of India: the hassle, the filth, the con men, the barrage of questions, the assault on the senses. The vast spirituality of the place simply could not get in past all the clutter of daily chaotic India.

All of this missed spiritual opportunity was not for want of trying, a little. When lonely hotel rooms offered a welcome TV, I would channel surf the 24/7 spiritual stations: Islamic Q TV, the guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the live Golden Temple broadcast, reruns of the epic Ramayana series (this would be like a station playing a continuous loop of Charleton Heston as Moses). I gravitated toward Q for the qaawali music, with its harmonium, tabla and voices at turns peaceful and passionate. Relaxing in my room with the sound turned up to "feel" the music, I admit I had some unconscious notion that I would "get" Islam by osmosis. The music on Sikh TV was also inspired. The guru Shankar had a sweet smile, and even though my Hindi was very limited, I felt calm just having him on in the room. Needless to say, this didn't get me anywhere useful, except to sleep at night.

It was not until I collapsed, shattered from the exhaustion that is India and a long-simmering desire

for a spiritual safety net, that I really felt for the first time, a bit stupidly, that the antidote to my craving was here, not only in the temples and mosques and gurudwaras I visited, but inside as well. But this is what is said about India. Maybe there is so much yoga, prayer, meditation, and the like here for the very reason that Indians would become untethered without it. If you can't find calm on the outside, you have to create it, inside. Meditation as survival.

For about a year, in between leading trips, I had been coming to Dharamsala, the residence in exile of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many Tibetan refugees. But with a lover living there, ex-pat coffee bars, and hikes to be taken, I had procrastinated, never heading down the hill to the temple where it all happens. Now, exhausted, panicked, and feeling crazy after not having a home for months on end, here just when I needed him was "Double H," the Dalai Lama, HHDL. With his annual spring teachings about to start, the spiritual season was in full swing. The vipassana center scheduled its twice-monthly retreats all through spring and summer. The Tibetan Tushita Meditation Center was also lively. Around town, at monasteries, at the Library of Tibetan works, there were daily chances for teachings with real Tibetan masters, translated into English. I signed up for an eight-day retreat immediately. Non-devotional to the core, I cried when HHDL entered the teachings. Oh.

In Buddhism, there is the concept of "taking refuge." I needed to start a real practice so badly, it was like mother and good medicine and my own personal boot camp rolled into one. I stopped dabbling and started committing. It certainly has been a lot harder than

watching gurus on TV. I am no longer waiting for serendipity to happen, to be swept away by the force of spirit. But I am no longer only in my head about religion either.

What I realized for myself was that sometimes all the reading and knowing in the world can give us information without insight, knowledge without wisdom. Sometimes a spiritual emergency is what is needed to jolt us into taking radical steps to change our lives, whether while traveling or living normal life. I thought I had been radical by leaving home, taking the job, choosing the challenge of all that would be new in India. Hanging out in temples had been inspiring, but I hadn't gone far enough. Traveler or spiritual seeker beware: nothing happens by osmosis.

Haikus of Light

Yakov Azriel

"In the night I have remembered Your name, O Lord. . . "
(Psalm 119:55)

Closer, yet closer,
Pull us closer to Your name,
Closer to its white.

We grope in darkness
And stumble in the blackness,
Surrounded by night.

Beyond perception,
The letters of Your name shine,
Distant, star-like, bright.

Yet we sense their blaze,
Their glowing sparks above us,
Their power, their might.

Teach us how to read;
Our lips will call out Your name,
Our fingers will write.

Yakov Azriel was born in the U.S. and has lived in Israel for many years. His first book of poetry, Threads From a Coat of Many Colors: Poems On Genesis, *was published in 2005 by Time Being Books. His poems have won prizes in international poetry contests. He is now working on a volume of poems based on Psalms.*

Despite our mistakes
And the shadows of our deeds,
Enhance now our sight.

Despite our blindness
And our stubborn, closed eyelids,
Let us see Your light.

Blessing

Corrine DeWinter

Every heaviness lifted from you,
Every hope blooming,
Every moment here and now,
and absolutely
meant to be.

Light

Paramahansa Yogananda

O blazing Light! awaken my heart,
awaken my soul, ignite my darkness,
tear the veil of silence,
and fill my temple with Thy glory.

Corrine DeWinter is the author of seven collections of verse and her work has appeared in hundreds of journals and books. She lives in Western Massachusetts.

Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952) was an Indian yoga master who popularized yoga in the West.

Time Out

Kathleen Duffy

I love the references in scripture that depict Jesus as 'getting away from it all.' I seem to connect immediately with how he may have been feeling at the time. It's probably because I, too, have a crowd making demands on me and on my time.

I love my life and I love the people that make my life what it is, but I long for space and silence and solitude. As with most people, circumstances have evolved and altered down through the years, but there has always remained a longing for and an ever deepening call to 'withdraw to a lonely place.'

While caring for my ninety-two-year-old father, who lives with us, my husband and I are raising the remaining four of our thirteen children! Any wonder I need escape?

As my father becomes more dependent and more fearful, getting away for any long periods has become increasingly difficult for me. The luxury of an eight-day directed retreat is a wonderful memory that still holds a promise for me some time in the future, but for

Kathleen Duffy is a qualified nurse with a long-standing interest in developing resources for spirituality and prayer guidance. This led to her being trained as a Spiritual Director with the Jesuits in Manresa House, Dublin. At present Kathleen is involved in prayer guidance, meditation, and the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius.

now I have adopted a 'little and often' strategy, and it seems to work.

Time apart and away from people and places has become a necessity for me, rather like the air that I breathe, so into each day I incorporate times and moments that nourish my body, soul, mind, and spirit.

Belleek Wood

Near our home is a beautiful wood that skirts along the River Moy. Here in Belleek Wood I find solace and sustenance in every season. In this place I walk along forest paths that wind through glades and groves of ash and oak. Here I savour a different type of retreat. Nature's generosity gives me wild raspberries that grow freely next to gently cascading streams. Here I often stand and stretch out my arms and my heart towards heaven in a gesture of gratitude to the Creator. Here the rain falls softly on my face and when a stiff Atlantic breeze leaves me gasping, my drooping spirit is restored and I am refreshed.

Graveyard Gratitude

Whenever it's not possible for me to get to my beloved Belleek, I take refuge in some hallowed spots in the local graveyard that spans across the hills behind our home. I think my children may regard me as 'freaky' but I have grown to love and appreciate the stillness and reverence of this sacred space. Here I reflect on those lives commemorated on the headstones, on those men and women and children who now make up the communion of saints and whose intercession I frequently seek. From this high vantage point I can sit in my secret place and watch the sun set as I call to

mind my friends and family who are on the other side of the Atlantic awaiting daybreak.

One Dark Night. . .

At night I often steal away into the darkness of my garden. There in stillness and secrecy I can just be. While nobody is watching, I commune with the universe and call to mind those people far away whom I love and who love me. We are all united in the embrace of God. The moon and stars share in my wonder and once again I know my own littleness and God's greatness.

Prayer Time

How jealously I guard 'my' hour each day!

Through the years the changing patterns of my days have altered with changing lifestyles. Small babies meant sleepless nights, and fatigue distorted my reason as well as my days! During these times my discerning and practical husband would come to the rescue and 'shoo' me away to rest and insist that I catch up on some sleep.

Nowadays it's less complicated (but not always easier) to ensure that I spend an hour apart. This time is like the air that I breathe. I can't live without it. What then if somebody or some situation arises to thwart my attempts for 'time out'? Years ago I would have railed against any intrusion, but I've mellowed with time. Perhaps I'm learning to become more like Jesus and have a more compassionate stance towards any invasion of what I foolishly regard as 'my' time.

Robert F. Campbell

Dennis

Bridget Haase

For years, Dennis drove a semi truck for a large grocery store chain. He could handle his truck, he'll tell you, through ice, blinding rain, snowstorms and just plain bumper-to-bumper traffic. He reveled in every minute on the road. So skilled was he that, before long, he was promoted to instructor of new driver recruits.

Now Dennis, a strapping man in his fifties, is living with multiple sclerosis at The Boston Home, a long-term care facility. His greatest challenge has been, over several months, to learn and practice the "sip and blow" method of using a straw to move his wheelchair. Recently, he proudly shared that he had finally managed to get to the elevator.

Sharing his exuberance, I asked enthusiastically, "Where did you go?"

"No place," he responded. "There was no one around to push the elevator button."

Looking at him, I tried to make sense out of this crippling disease. Perhaps he read my thoughts.

Sister Bridget Haase, O.S.U., is the spirituality coordinator at The Boston Home, Dorchester, Massachusetts, a long-term facility for younger adults living with multiple sclerosis. She has co-authored ENKINDLED: Holy Spirit, Holy Gifts, *and is the author of* WELL SAID: Children's Words of Wisdom.

"Would you like to know how I manage each day?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Each day, when I wake up, I tell myself that it's going to be a good day. Although I will eventually lose both, I am grateful that this day I can still move my head and speak. And so, no matter the struggle, I decide to live the day ahead on a positive note. Attitude is everything and opens the door to acceptance."

I listened as Dennis began to reminisce about the early stages of his disease. He shared how, before diagnosis, walking was difficult. He would stagger or hold on to rails to climb stairs, one at a time. He did not understand what was happening and could only feel embarrassment at his lack of both coordination and explanation. Friends thought he had a drinking problem and urged him to get counseling.

Some days he would be so weak that all he could do would be to rest quietly on the job, hoping no one would notice and label him lazy. A physically strong and independent man, he could no longer stack boxes or empty his truck.

"But," he reflected, "sometimes help comes full circle. The assistance I had rendered to others over the years on their bad days paid dividends. It's like the lesson your rear view mirror teaches, whether on a semi or a truck. People are always closer to you than they appear."

Dennis lived in doubt, confusion, and fear of the future. How would his family survive if he lost his livelihood? Who would care for him if his health continued to deteriorate?

Unable to pray, he did not turn to God for help. Instead, he turned to others, asking them to turn to

God for him. He leaned on the prayers of friends of all faiths. "I wanted to cover every base," he assured me.

Slightly dispirited with painful memories, Dennis continued his story. Gradually, he lost his mobility and independence. The time had come, he realized, to leave his family home and find another at The Boston Home in Massachusetts.

Life is a daily struggle for Dennis and those living and coping with multiple sclerosis, Lou Gehrig's disease, and other chronic neurological diseases. Paralysis has altered Dennis' life in countless ways.

Yet, Dennis is able to find gifts in his illness. He will readily tell you that he has met and loved people that, if he were not ill, he would have had no reason to meet. He knows now how much he needs people and has to rely on them for the smallest of acts.

"In the past," he says, "I would say that I was going to do this or that and I would. Now I have to ask someone to put the control in my mouth so that I can move my wheelchair. But it's not depressing. I'm just grateful when someone comes along to help me."

"Do you ever wish it were different?" I asked.

"Everyday," he gently responded. "But it isn't, so I accept what is without bitterness. And I am grateful for what I can do, enjoying it for as long as it lasts. I have learned to admit I need people. That's not easy but it's the only way now. When you need people, you discover just how much others are willing to respond. And I've discovered something else. It comes from a story my mother taught me as a child. Want to hear it?"

Curious, I nodded.

"I don't know how true it is but I believe it. They say that on each barge that moves along the Thames in

England there is a yellow line painted down the center. When the cargo is balanced and is in proportion to the weight of the barge, the yellow line is clearly visible. This is what each person manning the docks looks for—the yellow line. If it can't be seen, then it's time to shift the load, reduce it or hand it over to another barge."

I waited as Dennis took a deep breath and then slowly sipped from his water bottle.

"You see," he continued, "life is like that. We all have something to carry. Each morning, when I get up, I look towards God. I see him looking at my yellow line and I know that he promises to keep an eye on it. Trusting that, my heart knows that my barge can bear the weight of the day."

He grew silent. He began to blow in his wheelchair control-straw to take leave but then paused.

"Ironic, isn't it?" he chuckled. "For years I kept my eyes fixed on the yellow lines across two-lane state roads. I couldn't let my truck careen into traffic. Now God keeps an eye on mine so I can stay the course and finish my journey."

BOOK REVIEWS

Please enjoy these publishers' reviews of books that have recently come across our desk.

Journey in a Holy Land: A Spiritual Journal
by M. Basil Pennington
Paraclete Press, June 2006
www.paracletepress.com
508-255-4685

"When Basil would come into a room, all eyes would focus on his enormous presence, the gorgeous beard, the overflowing energy, and the sympathy and compassion he offered to everyone. He wanted so much to love everybody he met, but not everybody was responsive." ~ Father Thomas Keating

M. Basil Pennington's final book is a testament to his love for the Holy Land and the Jewish and Palestinian people. In a journal format, he describes his travels along the coast in Caesarea, in the hill country of Nazareth and Cana, down by the lake in Capernaum and Tabor, through desert shrines such as Jacob's Well and the mystical Qumran, in the holy city of Jerusalem, on Mt. Sinai, and finally, back to the beginnings of the Christian story, to Bethlehem.

Anyone familiar with the Holy Land—sacred in all three of the world's Abrahamic faiths—will delight in Pennington's apt descriptions and reflections while in familiar places. Christians of all backgrounds will also

appreciate his poignant meditations on The Cross, The Tomb, The Upper Room, The Temple, Stations of the Cross, Olivet, Bethany, and the Nativity.

M. Basil Pennington, OCSO, was a monk at St. Joseph's abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts. Perhaps the most prolific and widely-traveled Cistercian monk in history, Pennington has written previously of his travels to India, China, Mount Athos, and now, the Holy Land. He was the author of numerous books including the classic, *Centering Prayer,* and *Seeking His Mind.* Dom Basil died in the summer of 2005 from injuries sustained in a car accident. Thomas Keating, OCSO, his former abbot, wrote the preface to this book.

American Pilgrimage:
Sacred Journeys and Spiritual Destinations
by Mark Ogilbee and Jana Riess
Paraclete Press, June 2006
www.paracletepress.com
508-255-4685

Many Americans travel to seek a connection with the holy in a particular place; they are on pilgrimage which, the authors say, "is about stepping back, reflecting, and spending time in greater spiritual awareness. . . Pilgrimage is about opening ourselves to change and growth, and inviting new experiences to alter our perspective."

The United States has many vital centers of pilgrimage with a uniquely American flavor. In this book you will learn about eleven distinctively American sites of spiritual meaning and purpose—including the small adobe chapel, El Santuario de Chimayo, in New

Mexico; the national Shrine of St. Jude in Chicago; the ecumenical Community of Jesus on Cape Cod; and the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. This guide explores where, how, and why Americans set out to find the holy in the spiritual landscape around us.

"Pilgrimage is all about crossing boundaries, both literal and figurative, and one of the most significant boundaries to surmount is our human tendency to categorize God in terms of human institutions and denominations. In this book we'll see non-Catholics who pray to St. Jude or chant the divine office at Gethsemani; Christians who follow the teachings of Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh; and people from all traditions who feel compelled to make the walk to Chimayo on Good Friday." (from the introduction)

Mark Ogilbee holds an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and now lives in Vermont where he is a writer and editor. Jana Riess has a Ph.D. in American religious history from Columbia University and an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary. She is the religion book review editor for *Publishers Weekly,* and the author of *The Spiritual Traveler: Boston and New England.*

The Hidden Beauty of Everyday Life
by Kent Nerburn
New World Library, June 2006
www.newworldlibrary.com
800-972-6657 or 415-884-2100

In his new book, Kent Nerburn inspires us to recognize and acknowledge the beauty in the ordinary occurrences of our everyday lives. He writes, "Our lives

are filled with ordinary moments when the hidden beauty of life breaks into our everyday awareness like an unbidden shaft of light. It is a brush with the sacred, a near occasion of grace. Too often we are blind to these moments. We are busy with our daily obligations and too occupied with our comings and goings to surround our hearts with the quiet that is necessary to hear life's softer songs."

With clarity and poetic simplicity, Nerburn crafts stories from everyday experiences that offer lessons to the spirit and windows to the heart. He writes, "This is a book for those who believe that God speaks as surely in the murmurs of the trees and the laughter of the children as from the pulpits of the churches and the synagogues, who know that a mother tucking a child in bed is offering a prayer of joyful praise as surely as the cantor or the minister or the monk at evening vespers."

Whether he is standing before a sculpture in a cathedral in Florence or attending a funeral on an Indian reservation , Nerburn's words paint pictures that are truly unforgettable. His book is like a magnifying glass designed to help us see beyond the surface meanings of life to the place where the ordinary touches us with its spiritual meaning and depth.

Kent Nerburn holds a Ph.D. in religion and art and is internationally recognized not only as an author but as a sculptor, with works in such settings as the Peace Museum in Hiroshima, and Westminster Benedictine Abbey in British Columbia. He is the author of many books including *Simple Truths; Small Graces;* and *Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace.* He lives with his wife and son in northern Minnesota.

ENDPIECE

Pilgrimage

David Steindl-Rast

Father Damasus Winzen, founder of Mount Saviour, used to point out that the days start growing shorter at the very season when green fruit in every garden and orchard is just beginning to swell among the leaves and has a long way towards full ripeness. Could he have had an inkling that he would go to bed, five days after the summer solstice—his luggage packed for a long journey—and never wake up on this side of the great Now? Our inner pilgrimage follows its own mysterious guidance, no matter what outward goals we might still want to reach.

The difference between a journey and a pilgrimage is this: on a journey, reaching the goal means success; a pilgrimage is successful only when each step becomes the goal.

So, at this season of ever changing shades of green, i wish you—and all of us pilgrims—the grace of reaching with each step the Now that does not pass away. What a greening of the world this will mean.

"In the midst of a world in which hatred, strife, violence, and war dominate our consciousness, Brother David points our eyes in another direction and tells us that joy and peace are closer at hand than we might realize. (He) stretches out his arms, smiles, and says: 'Love wholeheartedly, be surprised, give thanks and praise—then you will discover the fullness of your life.'"~ Henri Nouwen

At present, Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk, serves a worldwide Network for Grateful Living, through www.gratefulness.org, an interactive website with several thousand participants daily from more than 235 countries.

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